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ABSTRACT

Drawing on findings of two Center for the Study of Community College (CSCC) projects, this paper reviews some of the services offered by community colleges to facilitate transfer to four-year institutions. Introductory material provides background on the low rates of student transfer and on the CSCC projects, which involve 6 large urban community college districts and 24 colleges participating in the Ford Foundation's College Transfer Opportunities Program. The next section focuses on community college efforts to improve articulation with both secondary schools and four-year institutions. After a section examining various approaches used in orienting students to college, the paper highlights activities in the areas of student assessment and placement, which include mandatory placement testing, computer-driven continuous assessment, cognitive mapping, and the use of learning styles inventories. The next section considers various approaches to counseling and guidance, including computer-based programs, mandatory advisement systems, mentor programs, and faculty involvement in counseling and advisement. After discussing some of the ways in which the colleges involved in the CSCC projects monitor academic progress and conduct follow-up studies of transfer students' success at four-year colleges, the paper concludes that educators must devise ways to obtain better data on transfer and to match special activities with special groups of students. (LAL)

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FACILITATING TRANSFER THROUGH STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Florence B. Brawer

Community colleges attract a broad range of non-traditional students by accepting people with poor academic preparation, offering courses at night and in off-campus locations, and allowing students to enroll in classes without being admitted to a degree or certificate program. Many of these students are of low income; many claim membership in minority groups. And most of the two year college students nationwide are part-timers who do not gratuate or transfer to four-year institutions.

Reliable data about the exact number of transfer students are difficult to obtain, largely because of the variations in definition and data collection procedures across states and between institutions. Better documented is a decline in the percentage of students who ultimately transfer from community colleges to universities. While the actual number of transfer students has increased, the percentage of full-time students attending community colleges in earnest pursuit of a baccalaureate degree has shrunk. The drop

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out rates continue high and the program completion rates, low.

Why do so few students complete community college programs and earn associate degrees? Why do so very few transfer? One reason is that the increased enrollments resulting from recruitment drives include a large number of students who either demonstrate only a casual committment to college studies or who feel they can attain their goals without the degree. At the same time, even when the direction appears definite, attrition rates in the transfer programs are also high. This may have less to do with personal commitment than with the kinds of counseling and guidance the students receive in clarifying and attaining their academic career goals.

In order to better understand the issues surrounding transfer, attrition, and program completion, we at the Center for the Study of Community Colleges have administered student inventories, surveyed counseling and guidance personnel, participated in case studies, and conducted literature reviews. Today I will report some findings that stem from two projects--one involving six large urban community college districts--Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Maricopa (Phoenix), Miami-Dade, and St. Louis--and another dealing with the 24 colleges participating in the Ford Foundations' College Transfer Opportunities Program (TOP). These will be discussed in terms of articulation, orientation programs, assessment and placement, counseling and guidance, and monitoring and follow-up activities. While I shall discuss these efforts in terms of community colleges, they apply equally well to four-year institutions where many of the problems relating to student preparation and attrition also exist.

ARTICULATION

Articulation has typically been associated with the concept of ascension--moving students from one level of education to a higher level. This has been as true of the community colleges as of the high schools. Only recently has articulation been considered a two-way street where community colleges operate as the pivotal point between the "feeder" secondary schools and the "receiver" four year colleges and/or universities.

Almost all colleges participating in the six large urban districts with which we are working have established linkages with their tributary high schools. Counselors provide some services when they go into the high school to inform and recruit students. The few faculty members who do recruit generally represent technical and occupational programs rather than liberal arts divisions, and they perform their recruiting activities independently of the counseling center. Seldom do faculty meet with their high school counterparts to discuss sequential course ordering, common programs, or ways to attract students to the community colleges.

Some colleges provide high school students with specific services or the use of campus facilities. Mesa College in the Maricopa District, for example, offers its campus for the Summer Youth Program and the High School Drop-out Program, thus encouraging attendance by populations with traditionally low college representation.

At the other end of the spectrum, and as part of its Emphasis on Excellence Program, Miami-Dade recruits gifted

students through its High School Achievement Award. Students in the top percent of their high school graduating class are eligible to receive scholarships as long as they maintain a required minimum grade point average at the college.

Lawson State Community College (Alabama) has designed a series of workshops with its six feeder high schools and its local university. These meetings are geared to transfer and are held with faculties from mathematics and science, and English and humanities.

Also addressing the community college/university connection, Florida's common course numbering system and common transcript format eases the transfer process for its students. And Maricopa is working under a FIPSE grant to align course numbering and letters with Arizona State University.

Transfer fairs on university campuses also help university students move from college to university. Admissions, Financial Aid, and Career Specialists sometimes visit students on their community college campus in order to discuss scholarship or transfer credit. (Community College of Baltimore). Cuyahoga Community College (Cleveland) has identified 130 students to participate in counseling, academic advisement, and special program activities as a way of enhancing their ability to transfer to a four-year institution.

ORIENTATION

The transition from high school to college is moderated when colleges offer orientation programs for their new students. Some institutions mandate program attendance, but most qualify this

requirement by including only students enrolling for six or more units and attending college for the first time. Attendance varies from 75 to 100 percent in some cases to less than half in others. When colleges present these orientation programs as part of, or just prior to, registration and assessment procedures, participation tends to increase.

By offering Human Development 100 as a mandatory course for all new full-time students, Mountain View College (Dallas) incorporates orientation into its academic structure. This course, taught by Counseling Center staff members, familiarizes students with the colleges' policies and procedures. West Los Angeles College and Maricopa's South Mountain Community College have developed video presentations to convey their orientation message and Jefferson Community College (University of Kentucky) offers a 16 week transfer orientation course. Compton College's (California) Honors Program for 9-12th grade students as well as its own students features a Family Orientation Program that focuses on program requirements and student responsibilities.

ASSESSMENT/PLACEMENT

Debates continue to be waged about the desirability and political wisdom of instituting comprehensive assessment and placement procedures for community college students, many of whom are academically underprepared. Required testing in reading, writing, and math is the most common variant of a comprehensive placement program. Some institutions administer tests in one or two of these basic skills areas and supplement their assessment data with required admission tests on such national achievement measures as the ACT or College Board examinations. Still others

use a combination of skills assessment, prior school achievement data, and personal interviews to arrive at program decisions.

Almost all colleges participating in our six urban district project administer placement or assessment tests in reading and writing so that they can direct students to the appropriate class level. A few colleges employ an assessment test in mathematics. Of the forty-four tests reported in use, eight were developed on the local campuses; all others were produced by nationally recognized agencies.

Most assessment tests are administered prior to or during registration so that the results are available for academic advising. Follow-up sub-tests are administered in some academic areas once a class is underway in order to determine more exactly a students' level of ability. In St. Louis, the testing/placement program has forced more students than previously to seek advisement. More than three-fourths of 34 urban colleges surveyed by our Center make assessment tests mandatory under certain conditions. New students are usually required to take the tests if they have enrolled in a minimum number of units or if they plan to enroll in a course in a specific academic area.

Exemplary approaches to comprehensive assessment operate in several institutions. Los Angeles Community College Districts' Project ACCESS--a computer-supported assessment procedure--yields academic and career interest data on new students; Miami-Dade's Camelot/RSVP computer-driven continuous assessment features periodic personalized student progress letters; and Valencia

(Florida) Community College's mail-in assessment program offers student self-programming. A district wide testing program operates in Dallas for all new students and for any student signing up for English and/or math courses, and Maricopa administers an English/Reading placement test to all students who take more than two courses and/or attempt to enroll in an English course.

Efforts to ensure the best matches possible between instructors and students prevail in a number of colleges. Pima (Arizona), Triton (Illinois), and Mountain View (Dallas) have incorporated into their programs such additional assessment as cognitive mapping and learning styles inventories. And City Colleges of Chicago has augmented its already comprehensive assessment/placement program with portfolio assessment services as well as with the career profiling resources of its Career Development and Placement Centers.

COUNSELING/GUIDANCE

What approaches do colleges take to advise their students, both new and continuing? Do counseling centers operate apart from instructional resources and classrooms, or have they been integrated into the academic programs that they are supposed to augment?

Tutors from Chicago's Resource Center sit in developmental classes to work directly with students, while supplemental instruction by peer tutors extends the learning time in high attrition classes at Triton (Illinois). Open computer labs are integrated into the total instructional program as an additional learning support at some colleges, and these simultaneously

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train both students and faculty to become literate in information technology. Through its linkage with both the University of Illinois and Control Data's Minneapolis program bank, Chicago's extensive Programmed Logic for Automated Operations (PLATO) program provides students with over 250 terminals and a massive program bank of instructional supplements. Chicago instructors require developmental students to log specific numbers of hours on PLATO as part of their course requirements, and faculty regularly develop new PLATO lessons as part of their in-service courses.

Students at Maricopa's South Mountain College are required to file an education plan with the counseling office before registering for classes. North Campus at Miami-Dade requires all students who have not yet declared a major to seek out academic advisory services. Both Maricopa's Phoenix College and Dallas' Richland College allow students to by-pass the academic advising requirement, as well as placement testing, if they agree in writing to accept full responsibility for their decision, a procedure which holds these students accountable for their own educational direction.

Nearly every college keeps its counseling office open during the evening in order to reach part-time and evening students. Peer advisors at Los Angeles' Pierce College visit certain evening classes each term to inform students of the kinds of services available to them. West Los Angeles College attempts to reduce scholastic shock through the services of mentor/counselors to high school students, while UCLA provides a similar service to

West Los Angeles students. Three outreach counselors from neighboring universities work at Harbor College's transfer center to help students complete admissions applications and financial aid forms.

Highland Park Community College (Michigan) has implemented a three-pronged effort to 1) identify potential transfer students and to develop a student data base system in order to improve support services; 2) upgrade counseling and instructional services to identified potential transfers; and 3) recruit students with good academic records from local high schools. To carry out these activities, this college initiated an assessment program, designed and implemented activities with four-year "receiver" colleges and universities and with "feeder" high schools, expanded its honors program, established work-study and cooperative education experiences to strengthen academic skills, upgraded counseling and instructional services, and enriched high school recruitment efforts for high academic achievers who would become potential transfers.

Faculty members also contribute to counseling efforts. Instructors from the City Colleges of Chicago play an integral role in academic advisement procedures since a faculty signature is required on all students' academic programs. This contact with faculty has become a viable part of the system. At other colleges, however, faculty participation is often more formal, and it varies greatly in the degree to which it is coordinated with the academic advising services of the campus counseling center.

In order to make use of career information available from

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faculty in a given academic field, Los Angeles Pierce College's counseling office requests the name of at least one faculty member from each department who is available to talk with students. In some departments all instructors have volunteered to provide counseling and advisement services.

Faculty are directly involved in advising students during the registration process at Dallas' Mountain View College, St. Louis' Forest Park campus, and Maricopa Tech. Most institutions reported that faculty members advise students majoring in their academic area. Well over half (24) of 34 colleges interviewed by our Center incorporate some type of training program to prepare faculty for their academic advising responsibilities.

An instructional delivery system that integrates academic courses, skills courses, and counseling services has been initiated at Los Angeles City College. Co-teaming academic instructors with developmental skills specialists in curriculum development and instructional delivery systems, this approach facilitates the mastery of skills necessary for specific academic content.

MONITORING ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND FOLLOW-UP STUDIES

How many colleges carry out follow-up studies to determine the success of their students in the four-year institutions to which they transfer, or in the job market in which they are involved? Research offices in four of the districts surveyed by our Center have conducted such follow-up studies within the past few years: Chicago, Dallas, Maricopa and Miami-Dade. Several campuses pointed out a reliance on data supplied by the four-year

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institutions which compare the overall grade point average of the transfer students with "native" university students.

At Maricopa's Glendale College, the head of counseling works directly with 300 minority students. He keeps careful files on each student, coordinates their courses with university demands, and maintains contact with a designated person at the transfer institution to meet with potential students.

The Los Angeles Pierce College Counseling Center carries out its own follow-up of students who go on to local state colleges and universities. Students are asked how well prepared they felt they had been to handle academic work at the four-year institution. The responses are compiled by institutions, presented in anecdotal form, and are available to students in the Counseling Center. In all, however, this type of activity is limited, and the data difficult to obtain. We still do not know the actual extent of transfer, let alone the students' success in the receiver institution.

SUMMARY

Various approaches to assisting students to transfer to four-year colleges and universities meet with various degrees of success. No one program can be everything to all people, just as not all the programs combined can meet with complete success. Yet it is heartening to know that six of the largest community college districts in the country and 24 colleges in the Ford Project are attending to the problems of transfer education and attempting to increase the transfer rates for their students. And it is challenging to know that we educators must devise ways to obtain better data and to match special activities with

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special groups of students.

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